



The Voice of the Child

Guidelines for Hearing the Voices of Children

The Church recognises that every Child should be supported to express their feelings, concerns and feedback, and that they should be listened to with empathy and care. These guidelines refer to the many ways they can communicate - through words, actions, friendships, creativity, and/or play. Hearing the voice of Children requires attuning to their communication styles that are age and culturally appropriate.

Every Child, regardless of age, background, ability, or culture, has valuable insights into their own social, emotional, physical, and cultural wellbeing. The Church desires to journey with every Child as they explore and grow in their Christian faith.

By creating welcoming, child-friendly and culturally safe Church ministry environments, the Church enables Children to share their ideas, perspectives, experiences and concerns with confidence. These guidelines seek to support Leaders, Staff and Volunteers at our Church to Hear the Voices of Children by giving practical examples of actions we might take to achieve this.

Listening and Creating Space for Voices

Staff and volunteers should create environments and opportunities where Children feel safe to speak up about their concerns, share their perspectives and feelings, and seek support to enable them to participate well in ministries. Some examples of how we might seek to do this include:

- Talk about child safety in all child-related ministries, including who Children can speak to should they have any concerns.
- Encourage kindness and respect during Children's ministries (e.g., Sunday School, youth programs and Church children's talks).
- Ensure all conversations take place in open, visible areas where other staff and volunteers are nearby to support transparency and safety.
- When Children share something sensitive, ensure they are aware you cannot keep secrets, and you may have to tell another adult.
- Avoid tone or reactions that may shame, silence or minimise a Child's perspective.
- Use gentle prompts such as "Would you like to tell me more?" rather than pressured or leading questions.
- Create child-friendly ways Children can give feedback.
- At the end of each school term or year, provide Children with age-appropriate, anonymous feedback forms or surveys.
- Acknowledge Children's feedback, affirm their feelings, and take the time to listen to them.
- Ensure a child-friendly explanation is given regarding how Children's ideas could be used, or the process of how they could be incorporated into ministry.
- Where appropriate, provide safe spaces Children can retreat to if feeling overwhelmed, such as a drawing table, a quiet corner with games, books and cushions.

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- Where appropriate, provide sensory items to help Children regulate emotions, such as fidgets and colouring sheets.
- Offer multiple ways for Children to express themselves – drawing, storytelling, games, emotion cards, or quiet discussions.
- Encourage and invite Children to help have a say in the songs, games, activities or service projects they participate in.

Recording and Reflecting on What Is Shared

All feedback should be documented in a respectful, confidential and culturally safe way. Some examples of how we might seek to do this include:

- Train Staff and Volunteers to listen well, be culturally sensitive, and respond appropriately.
- Train Staff and Volunteers to take respectful, non-identifiable notes (where applicable) and maintain privacy.
- Where relevant, seek guidance from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or culturally diverse leaders when interpreting feedback of a cultural nature.
- Respectfully review feedback as a team to identify patterns, celebrate improvements, and plan responses.
- Review each year how Children's voices have influenced programs, teaching or policies, and share outcomes with the Church membership.

Acting on Feedback and Following Up

Acting on and following up on what Children share affirms their worth and demonstrates Christ-like love, humility and care. It shows Children that their concerns matter and their safety is important. Ignoring or being dismissive of feedback can lead to harm and an erosion of trust. Some examples of how we might seek to do this include:

- Explain clearly to the Child what will happen next, who will be told, and why – ensuring confidentiality is respected appropriately.
- Involve families, cultural mentors or a trusted support person chosen by the Child or Young Person.
- Ensure Children always have the option to bring a trusted friend, sibling or adult when discussing next steps.
- Report any child safety concerns to the Safe Spaces Coordinator and follow the appropriate Reportable Conduct or Complaints and Concerns Procedures.
- Implement improvements and inform Children about the changes being made (e.g., "We added a quiet corner because you asked for it.").
- Use child-friendly communication tools such as a "You Said, We Did" board, a Church newsletter update, or a slide during Church notices.
- Ask Children whether the change made have helped them feel safer or more included and record their responses.